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ABSTRACT

Findings from a study to determine the knowledge base among Kentucky superintendents about site-based management (SBM) are presented in this paper. Questionnaires mailed to all of the state's 177 public school superintendents yielded a 73 percent response rate. Findings indicate that while there was considerable interest in SBM, there was significant confusion on the topic and superintendents were largely unaware of research supportive of participatory management in business and education. Respondents also expressed role ambiguity, resistance to immediate implementation of school-based management, doubt over the longevity of the innovation and a universal desire for school-based management training for respondents and their staff. (15 references) (LMI)

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SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT:

KNOWLEDGE BASE OF KENTUCKY

SUPERINTENDENTS

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ABSTRACT

As things are now, education is so cluttered and tangled up with a thousand senselss notions and stupidities, that the task of reformation is alsmot a superhuman one. It is entirely a task of taking away and reducing--not one of adding to, or explaining. It is the task of the sculptor, who cuts the superfluous marble off, rather than that of the wax-workman, who lays on the stuff thicker and thicker...

---Walt Whitman

Recent educational literature has stressed the benefits of site-based management as a valuable tool in school reorganization. Following a recent ruling of the state Supreme Court and legislative mandate for implementation of site-based management in Kentucky's public schools, a survey was designed for the purpose of ascertaining the "knowledge base" among Kentucky superintendents on site-based management.

The data revealed that while there was considerable interest in site-based management among superintendents, there was also significant confusion on the topic. Superintendents were largely unaware of a rather large body of research

which clearly demonstrated the merits of participatory management in business and industry, and more recently of site-based management in schools. Furthermore, the data revealed the existence of role ambiguity, resistance to immediate implementation of site-based management, doubt over the longevity of the innovation, and nearly universal desire for training in site-based management for the respondents and their staff members.

INTRODUCTION

School reform and restructuring have mandated several concepts for educational administration to enhance the ability of the school administrator to be an "instructional leader" (Bancroft & Lezotte, 1985). With emphasis on student achievement, the instructional leader for the next decade must be prepared to implement various components of site-based management, school level decision -making, and/or empowerment. Many reform factors have evolved from court decisions and reactions by state legislatures (Burns & Howes, 1988). Based on the June, 1989, decision of the Kentucky Supreme Court that education in the state was unconstitutional, and the reaction by the Kentucky General Assembly [legislature] requiring site-based management to address these mandates, interest developed concerning "who knows what about site-based management?"

The subject of school-based management is currently a much used topic of discussion in more than 30 states. School based management is an idea whose

time has come for many school systems across the United States. SBM, as it is sometimes called, is on line and is fully operational in several school systems and is an option to be considered by reformers involved in the reformation movement now seeping through the nation's schools.

The legacy of the current system of school management goes back in time for more than one-hundred years. It was born out of a mandate by legislatures to establish a system of common schools to educate children. Its goal was to meet the needs of society in a rapidly industrializing age. The centralized system of schools was developed from a decentralized system of one room schools that was unable to educate children to meet the needs of this new society. The new centralized system evolved along with the bureaucratic management system that we know today.

The current system of public education has lapsed into stalemate in many areas of the country. Many state systems are underfunded, resulting in less than adequate schools, which is leaving the education of the children in these schools in jeopardy. People are demanding for fundamental change. The question is will the management change may be a partial, or it a total one.

By definition, school-based management transfers operational decision making from the central district office to the individual school. Mertens and Yarger (1988) believe school-based management could provide a context for fully empowering and involving teachers in professional matters that concerns

them. It could provide the impetus and the structure for better alining the best of professional teacher culture with the legalities of school policy making and administration.

School-based management is often thought of in regard to other goals, such as increasing bureaucratic economy. However, in theory, it also provides the conditions for more fully developing teaching as a profession. Central to the concept of school-based management is involving those "closest to the action", the key players, making the decisions. School-based management provides an opportunity for bringing the expertise and experience of teachers to bear on educational problem solving and agenda determination (Mertens & Yarger, 1988).

School-based management may be utilized to empower and involve classroom teachers in the process of decision-making, but there are other issues to be considered as part of the concept. These issues include the concept of checks and balances, colleagiality, and peer review. Check and balance systems must be developed that enable role groups to understand and be sensitive to the needs of others and to work together in a spirit of cooperation based on respect and acceptance of mutual goals. Colleagiality is described as school environments that are based on the belief that everyone has the same set of professional purposes, that is, the instruction of children, and that everyone has a special contribution to

make. Teachers must have an opportunity to provide input into virtually all areas of school operations.

School administrators are likely to support school-based management because it helps them to escape the bureaucratic control of the central office (Mertens & Yarger, 1988). It is unlikely, however, that administrators will enthusiastically seize upon school-based management's potential for increasing teacher empowerment and involvement. However, school-based management may be an idea whose time has come politically.

Whenever the subject of SBM is brought up for discussion, there appears to be a fundamental lack of understanding of the real issues involved in school improvement. Part of this failure to understand may lie in the choice of words. Talking about school-based management seems to imply the school makes all the decisions, or all decisions. Such an interpretation fails to recognize that decisions made at school sites are the major arenas for educational improvement and change. Proponents of SBM believe the focus on the school as a "center for decision making and renewal" is critical to the reform of education and the development of schools to meet 21st Century needs. There is a significant difference between talking about schools as centers for renewal and depicting them as bases for management. The differences arise because the work center has two different meanings. Most educators agree that the individual school should be the focal point to affect change and bring about an improvement. There is

less agreement that the school should be the site of professional inquiry and reflective practice-- the place for the critical thinking, dialogue, decision-making, action and evaluation that determines educational change (Clark & Sirotnik, 1988).

In the 1960s and 1970s forms of school-based management, usually referred to as "decentralization" and "school-site budgeting," rose to popularity. These were adopted in order to give political power to local communities, increase administrative efficiency, and offset increases in state authority (Wissler & Ortiz, 1986). In the late 1980s, however, school-based management became the center of national attention for significantly different reasons. Site-based management (SBM) was being implemented to effect change in the educational process by empowering school staff to facilitate changes that would result in improvement, innovation, and continuous professional growth. (Carnegie Forum, 1986).

Actually, the idea of SBM (also referred to as school-based management, school-based decision making, etc.) is not entirely new. Many of the principles of site-based management are borrowed directly from business and industry. The trend towards decentralization of authority was noted by Naisbitt (1982) in his best-selling book **Megatrends.** The strategy of SBM is perhaps best implemented within the context of applying participatory management techniques and Deming's theory, labeled "Theory Z" by Ouche (Lewis, 1985) to complex

educational organizations. However, SBM has become more popular recently due to research on school effectiveness by Edmonds (1979) and Guthrie (1986) and it was thrust back into the spotlight following the reported dismal state of American public education by **A Nation at Risk** (1983) and **Carnegie Forum** (1986). Indeed, current interest in SBM is simply a response to the overwhelming evidence that our educational system is not working effectively, and that strong central control is repressive to teachers' morale, and correspondingly their level of classroom performance.

Although SBM takes many forms, David (1989) noted that the essence of SBM is school level autonomy plus participatory decision making. When SBM is working properly, more decisions flow **up** through the system than **down** from the top. This means, for example, that custodians are involved in solving custodial problems, teachers in solving classroom problems, principals in solving building-wide problems and superintendents in directing district-wide decisions.

Wissler and Ortiz (1988) noted out that the district superintendent is pivotal and crucial in assuring the success of any form of SBM. It was the superintendent's crucial role that necessitated this study.

KENTUCKY

Following a class-action lawsuit by a number of Kentucky's poorer school districts, Judge Ray Corn issued a landmark decision declaring the

Commonwealth's system of funding inequitable and unconstitutional (*The Council for Better Education, et. al. v. Martha Layne Collins,* 1989). The State Supreme Court shortly thereafter expounded on the Corn decision and declared the entire system of public education in the state unconstitutional and declared all statutes governing Kentucky schools null and void (*Rose, J. A. & Blanford, D. J. v. The Council for Better Education, et. al.*, 1989). The following year the state legislature undertook the extensive process of "restructuring" Kentucky's public schools. The keystone of the legislative mandate was SBM. For the purpose of this study, the legislature's definition of SBM is pertinent: "A decentralized, shared decision-making process in which the local school becomes the place where most of the decisions about schooling take place."

METHODOLOGY

There were no research instruments available which measured knowledge of SBM. Therefore, a survey instrument was developed by the researchers specifically for this study and subsequent studies of SBM. The survey instrument was a thirty item forced choice questionnaire which was designed to seek the necessary information in the most efficient way possible so as not to infringe on the limited time of the superintendent. The instrument was sent to all of Kentucky's 177 public school superintendents and generated at 73% response rate.

FINDINGS

The data indicated a wide range of perceptions on a number of key SBM concepts among Kentucky's superintendents. For example, 40% of the respondents agreed that SBM would be a valuable addition to their school system. In addition, 41% agreed with the statement, *site-based management is like other reforms, a passing fad.* However, the respondents were closer to consensus on a number of items. Almost 73% of the superintendents disagreed with the statement, *site-based management is largely substantiated by research.* Additionally, the call for training in SBM was nearly universal, with over 88% expressing a need for personal training, and 91% desiring training for staff members. Almost 63% of the respondents agreed wit the statement, *all administrators and teachers must participate in order to have operational site-based management.*

There was a great amount of disagreement and confusion among the respondents on the topic of SBM. The data suggested a shocking lack of knowledge among respondents of the large amount of data supporting implementation of site-based management. More than half the respondents simple did not know that SBM is being used successfully nationwide. Collectively, the disagreement, confusion, and lack of knowledge and skill in SBM could serve to impede a timely and successful transition to SBM in Kentucky's public schools.

The overwhelming percentage of respondents who noted their disagreement with the idea of immediate implementation of SBM could be reflective of natural resistance to change. However, 58% of the respondents were age 50 or over and almost 30% of the respondents had 16 or more years of experience in the superintendency. These data suggest the need for a well -prepared talent pool for replacement within the next few years.

There was a strong correlation between age and the tendency among respondents to agree that SBM, *is like other educational reforms, a passing fad.* Given the long history of failed attempts at school reform, perhaps superintendents are "conditioned" to doubt the substance and longevity of reform and innovation. Strong disagreement among respondents to the statement that SBM *does not involve additional funding* was reflective of prior experiences with implementing mandated reforms without the necessary funding.

Approximately one-half of all respondents believed that with SBM, *the principal's authority is diminished,* and 69% believed *that teachers vote to employ the principal.* Finally, on a more positive note, there was overwhelming agreement among all respondents, that training in SBM was needed by all educators.

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